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ABSTRACT

Considerable evidence indicates that a significant positive relationship exists between superior communication receptivity and subordinate satisfaction with supervision. This relationship may be affected by the subordinate's level of communication apprehension. This study hypothesized a main effect for participation permissiveness and an interaction between that permissiveness and communication apprehension. Dependent measures include supervisor and work satisfaction, supervisor competence, character, sociability, composure and extroversion, task and social attraction, power and quality. Findings supported the main effect hypothesis. No support was found for the interaction prediction. A post hoc explanation for the findings suggests a general negative evaluation of the high apprehensive supervisor. (Author)

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COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION, SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATION RECEPTIVITY AND SATISFACTION WITH SUPERIORS

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Summary

Considerable evidence indicates that a significant positive relationship exists between superior communication receptivity and subordinate satisfaction with supervision. This relationship may be affected by the subordinate's level of communication apprehension. This study hypothesized a main effect for participation permissiveness and an interaction between that permissiveness and communication apprehension. Dependent measures include supervisor and work satisfaction, supervisor competence, character, sociability, composure and extroversion, task and social attraction, power and quality. Findings supported the main effect hypothesis. No support was found for the interaction prediction. A post hoc explanation for the findings suggests a general negative evaluation of the high apprehensive supervisor.

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COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION, SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATION RECEPTIVITY AND SATISFACTION WITH SUPERIORS

There has been considerable emphasis in the organizational behavior literature on the role of subordinate participation in decision making. The overall effect of this participation seems clear. Individuals who fully participate in relevant decision making processes have greater satisfaction with supervisors and often their positions than similar but less participating others. Specification of possible limiting conditions are less well defined. This even though virtually every model of organizational activity (eg., Katz & Kahn, 1966; Redding, 1972) presupposes a complex interactive system of supervisors, subordinates and environmental influences. This report examines across two different environments one possible intervening subordinate characteristic: communication apprehension. As such it represents a chain of research exploring the role of oral apprehension within the organization (eg., Daly & Leth, 1976; Daly & McCroskey, 1975; Falcione, McCroskey & Daly, 1976).

Review of Related Literature

Participation

A wide variety of theories of organizational behavior suggest that subordinate participation should be associated with greater satisfaction with supervision as well as with work. For example, House and Mitchell's (1974) path-goal model includes participative leadership as an integral part of their typology of leadership styles. Likert's (1961, 1967) conception of supportivness implicitly makes the suggestion as well. Similarly, Tannenbaum's (1958, 1966) orientation towards leader authority patterns emphasizes the positive effects of management allowing high levels of participation. Sociological theorizing by Patchen (1970) indicate support for the conception that employee participation in decision making leads to stronger identification with management and greater solidarity with and loyalty to the organization. Recent reviews of organizational communication (Redding, 1972), leadership (eg., Stogdill, 1974) and organizational behavior (eg., Vroom, 1964, 1969; Yukl, 1971) provide more extensive summaries of the various theoretic explanations for such a relationship.

The empirical findings are relatively consistent. In a landmark study Coch and French (1948) found that pajama factory employees allowed the chance to discuss and formulate organizational decisions relevant to them performed significantly better than those not

provided such an opportunity. This finding, later replicated in a Norwegian factory by French, Israel and Aas (1960) was followed by a spate of research using a variety of dependent measures (mostly satisfaction indices) in a number of different settings (eg., Avery, Dewhirst & Boling, 1976; Cooper & Wood, 1974; French, Kay & Meyer, 1966; Levine, 1973; Morse & Reimer, 1956; Patchen, 1970; Wexley, Singh & Yukl, 1973). These findings led Blumberg to conclude that "there is hardly a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction with work is enhanced or that other generally acknowledged beneficial consequences accrue from a genuine increase in workers' decision making power. (Blumberg, 1968).

The vast majority of studies conducted to date have dealt almost exclusively with supervisor characteristics. The democratic superior was compared with the autocratic boss. The supportive, receptive superior was contrasted with the non-supportive, closed manager. Far less research examines subordinate characteristics that might affect the relationship between satisfaction and participation. Vroom (1958) for example found that while there was a significant overall relationship between subordinate perceptions of participation permissiveness and satisfaction with job, the subordinates' level of authoritarianism and independence need interacted with participation to affect measureably the relationship. High authoritarians and those with low needs for independence indicated a less positive effect for participation permissiveness than their opposities. Campion (1968) replicated the Vroom (1958) finding within an experimental laboratory setting. Similarly Weed, Mitchell and Miffitt (1976) found that subordinate dogmatism (a close cousin to authoritarianism) interacted with participation on satisfaction. Other researchers have worked with variables such as locus of control (eg., Runyon, 1973) and achievement need (Patchen, 1964) finding as would be expected interactions between the individuals' psychological orientation and participation permissiveness.

Communication apprehension

Communication apprehension refers to a broad based fear or anxiety regarding oral interaction. The individual who is high in this apprehension is one for whom the negative consequences attached to participating in an oral interchange outweigh any perceived gain. As a consequence it is generally marked by a withdrawal from situations that might place the individual in a communicative role (Daly, 1975; Phillips, 1968; Phillips & Metzger, 1972).[1]

Previous research has clearly indicated the pervasive nature of communication apprehension. A national survey organization reported late in 1973 that a major portion of the American population felt speaking in public to be their number one fear (Bruskin, 1973). Communication apprehension has been found to predict occupational and academic major choices and desirability perceptions

(Daly & McCroskey, 1975; Daly & Shamo, 1976), interview decisions (Daly & Leth, 1976), lowered interaction in small groups (Wells & Lashbrook, 1971) and the tendency to select non-interaction positions in small group settings (McCroskey & Lepard, 1975). Individuals with high apprehension tend to engage in lowered levels of self disclosure (Hamilton, 1972), rate themselves lowers in self esteem and self credibility (Hamilton, 1972; McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Falcione, 1976; McCroskey & Richmond, 1975), lack trust in others' communicative behaviors (Low, 1951; Giffin & Heider, 1967), have difficulty discussing personal problems (Heston & Anderson, 1972), especially with significant others such as parents (Phillips, 1968) and tend to feel isolated in social relationships (Low & Sheets, 1951). More recent evidence indicates that highly apprehensive individuals evaluate themselves lower on a number of personality dimensions and sociological indices (Rosenfield & Plax, 1976; McCroskey, Daly & Sorenson, 1976).

In addition to self ratings, research has also indicated that individuals with high apprehension are evaluated less favorably by others. Daly, McCroskey and Richmond (1976) demonstrated that individuals with low vocal activity (a characteristic of high apprehension)are evaluated lower on dimensions of credibility, attraction, power, leadership and influence. These rating were consisrent across levels of apprehension of rater, Subsequent support for that finding has been provided partially by Daly and Lashbrook (1976) and McCroskey, Daly, Richmond and Cox (1976).

Statement of the Problem

Consistent evidence indicates that participation permissiveness is associated with higher satisfaction on the part of the subordinate. Less research has examined the intervening variables associated with the subordinate. When these have been considered the strength of the relationship is affected. Given the nature of communication apprehension we would suspect it to serve as a moderating variable. We would hypothesize a main effect for participation permissivness as well as an interaction between participation and apprehension such that highly apprehensive individuals will regard highly receptive superiors less favorably than low apprehensives would and vice versa for low participation permissive managers. In a sense we are suggesting that subordinates who "fit" with their superiors react most positively.

Method

Subjects: Two diverse groups of subjects were used for this research. The first group (n=210) consisted of working adults employed in a large naval research organization on the East coast. Their participation was voluntary. The second sample (n=173) were high school and elementary school teachers from a tri-state area of the Eastern seaboard. Participation by them was part of a classroom exercise during an extension course.

Procedures: Subjects completed a series of scales (described below) that were designed to measure superior communication receptivity

(i.e., participation permissiveness or psychological participation), their evaluation of superiors and their satisfaction with their work.

Measures: There were two measures used as independent variables in this study.

a. Communication apprehension: The twenty five item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) was used to assess subjects' level of apprehension. A mean split was used to differentiate high and low apprehensives. Although a common procedure is to include only those above or below one standard deviation from the mean we opted to increase our sample size instead. A check was made to determine if there were any variations between the results due to this change in operational procedures. No differences were found. The PRCA has good reliability and validity (McCroskey, 1970, 1975).

b. Supervisor communication receptivity: A five item measure drawn from a larger pool of items developed by Falcione (1975) was used to measure subjects' perceptions of superiors' participation permissiveness. The items were:

1. Do you feel free to bring up important things about your job with your immediate supervisor?
2. Does your immediate supervisor encourage you to make suggestions for improvements on the job?
3. In general, how often does "frankness" and "openness" exist between you and your immediate supervisor?
4. Some people can be described as "approachable" (easy to talk with), while others are "distant" (not easy to talk with). Would you describe your immediate supervisor as approachable or distant?
5. How often does your immediate supervisor ask for your opinions concerning upcoming decisions?

These items are very similar to those used in previous studies concerning participation permissiveness (eg., Vroom, 1958). Subjects in the government sample responded to each item on a seven step measure while subjects in the teacher sample used a five step scale. The average intercorrelation among the five items was .580 for the teacher sample and .584 for the federal data. Table 1 provides the item total correlations for each sample. As one can see, the magnitude of correlation across samples was quite similar and in both cases high. A mean split was used to differentiate high and low communicative receptive supervisors.[2]

There were a number of dependent measures used in this study. They were:

a. Job satisfaction: The Job Description Index developed by Smith, Kendall & Hulin, (1969) was used to assess five dimensions of subordinate satisfaction with work: supervisor, pay, co-worker, promotion and overall work. Only the supervisor and overall work factors were used since only they seemed relevant. One modification of the measure was made. The instrument was altered so that subjects responded to items on seven step scales. A discussion of the rationale

for the change was made in Daly, McCroskey and Falcione (1976).

b. Supervisor credibility: A five factor measure derived from work by Falcione (1974) was used to assess perceptions of supervisor credibility on five dimensions: competence, composure, character, sociability, extroversion.

c. Supervisor attractiveness: Two factors: task and social attraction were measured using instruments reported by McCroskey and McCain (1974).

d. Quality: Perceived communication quality of the superior was assessed by a five item, unidimensional measure devised by Daly (1975) and discussed more fully by Daly and Lashbrook (1976).

e. Power: A four item, one dimension measure of perceived power influence was administered. The measure was developed and reported by Lashbrook (1972).

Design and preliminary analysis: In an attempt to avoid the likly type one errors incurred by the number of dependent measures the alpha level was set at .001. In addition omega squared values were computed (Hays, 1973). These values provide information on the proportion of variance accounted for due to an effect.

As a check on the validity of the assignment of subjects and superiors into various levels of apprehension and receptivity as well as determing whether these two variables interacted with one another two analyses of variances were computed for each sample. The first factor in each case was apprehension level; the second, receptivity level. Only a main effect for apprehension level was observed for apprehension scores in both samples. Individuals classified as high in apprehension ($\bar{X}$:f=81.71;$\bar{X}$:t=89.76) were significantly higher ($F(1,206)=457.51, p<.00001$;$F(1,169)=279.93, p<.00001$) than those classified as low ($\bar{X}$:f=52.11;$\bar{X}$:t=63.72). No other effect approached significance. Supervisors classified as highly receptive ($\bar{X}$:f=31.32;$\bar{X}$:t=20.20) were significantly different ($F(1,206)=370.26, p<.00001$;$F(1,169)=405.21, p<.00001$) from those classified as low ($\bar{X}$:f=19.29;$\bar{X}$:t=12.33). Again, no other effects were significant.

Results

The first hypothesis of a main effect for participation permissiveness was supported for all variables with the exception of overall work satisfaction in the teacher sample. Table 2 provides a summary of the mean values, F ratios and effect sizes. There were no significant main effects for communication apprehension (at the .001 level) nor were there any significant interactions between apprehension and receptivity.

Discussion

The first hypothesis received consistently good support. The average effect size across samples for participation permissiveness was 18.83%.

The failure to support the interaction hypothesis is disappointing. It should be noted that there were a number of interaction F ratios that would have met conventional levels of significance (eg., .05). However, we restricted, perhaps too conservatively the necessary alpha level for acceptance and as a consequence are unable to accept the existence of such interaction. There are a number of possible explanations. First, it is possible that the effect for participation was just so great that any interaction effect was doomed to insignificance. Second, there may be more basic variables underlying the perceptual differences that subjects made in regards to supervisors. Given the lack of a main effect or interaction on receptivity due to apprehension we know that there was little if any difference attributable to apprehension of subject on the perception of participation permissiveness. Third, perhaps communication apprehension does not play as vital a role in the determination of satisfaction as initially thought. At the same time though, participation permissiveness could be considered somewhat synonmous with supervisor apprehension. The highly apprehensive supervisor should not be as receptive to communication as the low apprehensive manager. If this is true, no interaction would be expected given previous research. Daly and Leth (1976) found that irregardless of rater's apprehension level, high apprehensive applicants were rated lower than low apprehension applicants. Similar findings were reported by McCroskey, Daly, Richmond and Cox (1976). They found that regardless of the evaluator's apprehension level the high apprehensive individual was rated lower on attractiveness. Similar results had previously been reported by Hendrick and Brown (1971). Similarity was not a good predictor. If this last line of argument is reasonable then the findings reported above provide additional support for the negative consequences observed so often with apprehension. The supervisor who is apprehensive is not particularly liked by his or her subordinates.

This study differs in three basic ways from previous work. First, it considers communication apprehension as a possible intervening variable. It appears, at least in the terms we hypothesized, that it is not. Second, it deals with two very different types of organizational personnel (teachers and federal workers) and discovers the same effects across both cases. Third, it more completely defines the effects of participation on supervisor evaluations. The previous research used, at the very most, a generalized measure of supervisor satisfaction. We know can suggest that increased receptivity will lead to higher evaluations in terms of a number of interpersonal perceptions such as trustworthiness, competence, task and social attraction, power, quality, sociability, composure and extroversion as well as more generalized satisfactions with work and supervision.

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Table 1

Item-Total Correlations for

both Samples

Item	Federal (n=210)	Teacher (n=173)	Average
1	.73	.79	.76
2	.85	.83	.84
3	.85	.85	.85
4	.85	.81	.83
5	.82	.80	.81
Avg.	.82	.82	.82

Table 2

Summary of Means, Significant F Ratios
and Omega squared values

Dependent		Federal (1,206)	Teacher (1,169)
Overall work satisfaction	High	87.28	96.05
	Low	79.69	93.98
	F_2	12.71c	1.69d
	w^2	5.17	.40
Supervisor satisfaction	High	93.93	94.48
	Low	77.04	71.90
	F_2	105.59a	96.29a
	w^2	33.28	35.25
Competence	High	11.81	21.18
	Low	8.15	17.56
	F_2	35.74a	18.91b
	w^2	14.13	9.36
Composure	High	15.17	20.09
	Low	11.53	14.75
	F_2	21.71b	29.84a
	w^2	8.99	14.16
Character	High	12.93	23.78
	Low	8.41	17.87
	F_2	52.17a	65.52a
	w^2	19.57	27.24
Sociability	High	13.33	23.52
	Low	7.65	17.38
	F_2	76.07a	70.70a
	w^2	26.50	28.36
Task Attraction	High	21.64	20.05
	Low	18.29	16.79
	F_2	39.25a	26.82a
	w^2	15.51	12.75
Social Attraction	High	20.69	20.03
	Low	16.05	15.50
	F_2	73.91a	49.13a
	w^2	25.74	21.89
Quality	High	18.75	24.70
	Low	11.73	18.18
	F_2	65.35a	33.57a
	w^2	23.53	15.65
Power	High	14.41	20.70
	Low	10.79	16.65
	F_2	24.19a	21.69a
	w^2	10.02	10.75

a: $p<.00001$ b: $p<.0001$ c: $p<.0008$ d: $p<.19$

Footnotes

1. Communication apprehension is in a sense a misnomer. Recent work indicates that there are various forms of apprehension, only one of which refers to oral interaction. For example Daly and Miller (1975) have initated work on apprehension of writing. Similarly, Wheeless (1975) has suggested the existence of what he labeled "receiver apprehension."

2. The range of possible responses varied across samples. For the teacher sample responses to the five items were on five step scales. For the federal sample, the scale for each item was on a seven point continuum.